



Institutional Response Form

Institution: University of Colorado Boulder **Institutional ID:** 1038

Evaluation Type: Open Pathway, Comprehensive Evaluation: Visit to include a Federal Compliance
Reviewer: Dr. Edwin Imasuen

Date: 02/03/2020

Printed Name of President or Chancellor*: Dr. Philip P. DiStefano

Phone: (303) 492-8908 **Email:** Phil.Distefano@Colorado.EDU

Signature of President or Chancellor:

Philip P. DiStefano

*(*HLC expects the response from the President, Chancellor, or chief executive officer if a different title is used.)*

Instructions for Submitting Response

1. This form, and an additional written response if you choose to include one, must be submitted to HLC at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Institutional Responses" from the list of submission options to ensure the documents are sent to the correct HLC staff member.

2. If you choose to write an additional written response, it should be in the form of a letter to the Institutional Actions Council, should not exceed five pages, and must be sent electronically with this form within the two-week timeframe.

If a response is not received within the two weeks, HLC will conclude that the institution concurs with the accreditation recommendation.

General Questions

Please indicate ONE:

- The institution concurs with the accreditation recommendations and chooses not to submit a further response.
- The institution concurs with the accreditation recommendations and has enclosed a written response (please return with this form).
- The institution does not concur with the accreditation recommendations and chooses not to submit a further response.

- The institution does not concur with the accreditation recommendations and has enclosed a written response (please return with this form).
- The institution does not concur with the accreditation recommendations and requests an in-person hearing in place of an Institutional Actions Council (IAC) meeting (see definitions below).

In-person hearings are restricted to specific types of evaluation recommendations by HLC policy. These are: reaffirmation of accreditation; biennial visits in candidacy; focused visits; and financial and non-financial indicator monitoring. All decisions regarding substantive change and staff recommended monitoring or changes to the Statement of Affiliation Status are not eligible for in-person hearings. *Pathways designations recommendations are not eligible for in-person hearings.* Contact your HLC staff liaison for more information. Fees for in-person hearings are found in the schedule of *HLC Dues and Fees* at hlcommission.org/dues.

Definitions

Institutional Response. HLC expects a written response from the President or Chancellor of an institution (or chief executive by a different title) within two weeks of receipt of an accreditation report or reaffirmation recommendation and provides the attached response form for this purpose. The institution may choose to include an additional written response in the form of a letter from the President or Chancellor to the Institutional Actions Council. These additional written responses should not be longer than five pages and must be received electronically with this form within the two-week timeframe.

Institutional Actions Council (IAC). The IAC is composed of Board-appointed peer reviewers and public members. The First and Second Committees of IAC conduct electronically mediated meetings and in-person hearings to review and act on accreditation recommendations.

IAC Meeting. IAC meetings consist of five or more members of the First or Second Committee of IAC, who read the full materials of the evaluation, discuss the findings, and act on the accreditation recommendations. IAC committees may agree with the accreditation recommendations they review or offer differing recommendations or decisions. The meetings are electronically mediated and held eight or more times per year. The majority of accreditation recommendations are reviewed at an IAC meeting. Exceptions include recommendations that are required by policy to be reviewed at an in-person hearing and recommendations that institutions request be reviewed at an in-person hearing instead of an IAC meeting.

IAC Hearing. In some circumstances, an institution may request or may be required to attend an IAC Hearing. IAC Hearings consist of five or more members of the First or Second Committee of IAC, who read the full materials of the evaluation, discuss the findings, and act on the accreditation recommendations. Conducted three times per year, IAC Hearings are held in-person and require the presence of institutional staff, HLC staff and evaluation team representatives. There is a fee for requested hearings. An institution that is considering an IAC Hearing should consult with its HLC staff liaison for more information, as not all accreditation decisions are eligible for review and action at a hearing.

IAC First Committee. Members of the IAC First Committee conduct meetings and hearings to act on accreditation recommendations. The First Committee is the initial group to review an institution's case after an accreditation evaluation; the Committee may agree with the evaluation team's recommendation or it may offer a different recommendation or render a different decision.

IAC Second Committee. In some circumstances, institutions or HLC staff may request that the First Committee's decision be reviewed by the IAC Second Committee. Members of the Second Committee conduct meetings and hearings to act on accreditation recommendations forwarded on request or by policy after the action of the First Committee. The Second Committee may agree with the evaluation

team's recommendation or First Committee's decision or it may offer a different recommendation or render a different decision. Institutions should consult with their HLC staff liaison for more information.

February 17, 2020

On behalf of the faculty, staff and students of the University of Colorado Boulder, we thank the Higher Learning Commission review team and its chair, Dr. Margaret Bloom, for the team's report and recommendations. The accreditation process has been an exceptional opportunity for CU Boulder to engage in introspection about the university's strengths and challenges. We are committed to incorporating the thoughtful feedback of the review team as we focus and expand our plans in progress for the future of Colorado's flagship university. This response describes how CU Boulder is addressing major themes in the team report.

Strategic Planning

The team report comments on much that our university has to be proud of. Foremost among these is CU Boulder's planning for a successful future through our five strategic initiatives: (1) Academic Futures; (2) Foundations of Excellence; (3) Inclusion, Diversity and Excellence in Academics (the IDEA Plan); (4) Strategic Facilities Visioning; and (5) Financial Futures. The team describes these strategic initiatives, taken together, as "a visioning and strategic planning attempt with strong mission alignment" that "involves broad campus engagement, vetting, and calls for feedback" (Core Component 1A).

CU Boulder has now entered the implementation phase of Academic Futures, which sets out the university's priorities for a rich future of teaching, learning, research, scholarship and creative work in service to the public good. Academic Futures endorses and incorporates the courses of action recommended by Foundations of Excellence, our strategic initiative for first-year education; the IDEA Plan, our roadmap for making excellence inclusive; and actions based upon theme-driven priorities that emerged from townhalls, unit-level meetings, white papers and other responses from the campus community.

As implementation of Academic Futures, Foundations of Excellence and the IDEA Plan moves forward, the infrastructural and financial support and planning provided by the Strategic Facilities Visioning and Financial Futures initiatives are guiding our efforts. Our projects already underway or in the planning phase—for example, coordinating and expanding online and distance education; removing barriers to and creating strong incentives for interdisciplinary teaching, research and creative work; and creating a campus-wide Center for Teaching and Learning—are being made possible by new approaches to fiscal and infrastructural planning and development. Implementation of these strategic initiatives is also made possible by the tremendous creativity, energy, and good will of our faculty, staff and students. For example, Academic Futures calls for comprehensive shared governance structures across every school and college, and teams of faculty, staff, and students are already at work to set these structures into place and make them responsive to community needs.

The team report encourages CU Boulder to take our strategic initiatives further, and also to commit to ongoing assessment of their financial effects in the long term (Core Component 1A). We agree, and we are building ongoing evaluation of costs to the university and benefits to our students and our mission into the implementation of all of these projects.

General Education and Assessment

Two HLC recommendations regarding teaching and learning are a particular focus of the team report, and we want to emphasize that CU Boulder is committed to engaging in these efforts.

General education. The first recommendation has to do with establishing a common general education experience for all undergraduate students at CU Boulder (Core Component 3B). This recommendation aligns fully with our strategic planning: the Academic Futures strategic initiative recommends a campus-wide common learning experience and a common set of intended learning outcomes. The provost is currently initiating the campus discussion of a common curriculum. We look forward to reporting at the time of our next HLC Assurance Argument on the shape, goals, implementation, and planned assessment of that curriculum.

Assessment. The second recommendation has to do with creating a sustained, cross-campus plan for assessing student learning (Core Component 4B). As described in our 2019-2020 Assurance Argument and as the team report reiterates, CU Boulder has developed a leadership team and has committed resources toward this effort, which is being carried out under the direction of a new senior vice provost position. The team is coordinating assessment planning with our longstanding, robust program review process in order to build ongoing assessment planning into a regular cycle. This academic year, for example, the social sciences departments, which are beginning their program review process, worked to create and/or update their student learning goals and their assessment plans. We look forward to reporting to the HLC on the further implementation of this project, and other related projects across campus.

Other Areas of Focus

The team report also mentions a number of areas crucial to CU Boulder's mission that are central to our efforts in the upcoming accreditation review cycle and beyond. We would like to highlight just a few that are especially important to our goals.

Diversity and inclusion. The team report offers welcome feedback on a number of aspects of CU Boulder's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The report notes, for example, that the university has considerable work to do in increasing the diversity of the faculty (Core Component 1A), serving our constituents with diverse backgrounds (Core Component 1B), and educating our faculty in inclusive pedagogy (Core Component 2D). The just-launched implementation of the IDEA Plan targets improvements in all of these areas. For example, the provost has just announced a budget-supported plan for hiring that will significantly augment current initiatives to increase faculty diversity. Similarly, the vice chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement is leading an effort to bring together students and university leaders to review our current policies, procedures and training as well as where we need new or modified policies, procedures and training to create a more inclusive campus environment.

Student success. At a number of points in the report, the team mentions elements crucial to improving student success at CU Boulder. These include many of our top priorities, such as improving our retention and graduation rates; maintaining and improving advising and other student services—including, especially health and wellness—in light of a growing student population; and investing further in known success strategies such as our pilot "CU 101" courses and "early alert" program. Graduate student success is also a priority, and the Graduate School strategic planning effort, currently in progress, will

address such efforts as improving graduate student mentoring on a campus-wide basis—another goal endorsed by the team report.

Accessibility and affordability. Keeping a CU Boulder education affordable and accessible to our students is central to CU Boulder’s mission of serving the public good. The team report notes, for example, their concern that the high cost of living in Boulder is a barrier to retention and student success (Core Component 4C). We share that concern. As the team also reports, CU is undertaking a number of efforts in this area. These include increased funding allocated for need-based aid; the CU Boulder Guarantee, which fixes undergraduate resident and nonresident tuition and fees for four years; the CU Promise program, which guarantees low-income Colorado undergraduate students enough grants and work-study employment to pay for their share of tuition, fees and estimated book expenses; and the elimination of course and program fees. Another affordability factor addressed in the team report, graduate student funding, is a top priority. CU Boulder has, over the last five years, invested more than \$8 million into graduate student stipends, increased the campus subsidy of graduate student health insurance, and eliminated the athletic fee for graduate students. Campus leadership made further announcements in fall 2019 responding to the Graduate Task Force Stipends and Benefits, including offering dental insurance with a campus subsidy of 91% of the total cost; providing paid parental leave of up to six weeks following birth or adoption; and covering the cost of the local transit system college pass. Other proposed reductions in graduate student fees are currently under consideration by the University of Colorado Board of Regents.

Summary

For more than a century, the accreditation process has aided CU Boulder not only in affirming its status as one of the nation’s top universities, but also in setting its aspirations even higher—and then achieving those aspirations. The Higher Learning Commission’s focus on continuous institutional improvement is one we share and celebrate, both within our strategic initiatives, within the larger work culture of our university, and particularly within the values of campus leadership at all levels. We look forward to working in partnership with the HLC in the upcoming accreditation cycle as we report on our plans and their implementation, and as we garner further feedback and collect further data on our efforts, both from the HLC and from the CU Boulder community.